

Homosexual PTA awaits charter from state group

Critics hit double standard in Seattle

By Andrea Billups
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The nation's first homosexual parent-teacher association has organized in Washington state.

The Seattle-area group, called the Gay Lesbian Parent Teacher Student Association of Greater Puget Sound, will soon be granted a charter by the Washington State Parent Teacher Association.

Individual states, not national PTA officials, are allowed to decide which groups to approve for membership, national PTA spokeswoman Suzanne Block said.

"It is my understanding that Washington state does have PTAs for grandparents, so it's not unusual for PTAs to be chartered around certain segments of the population," she said.

A similar attempt to form a homosexual PTA in Florida was quashed by state PTA officials in 1996. The national PTA office has received no complaints about the formation of the new Washington state chapter, she said.

The Washington state group, which will be regional and not tied to one school district, claims about 50 members who hope to address issues faced in schools by homosexual, bisexual and "transgendered" students, their teachers and parents. Membership is open to anyone who is interested, including parents of homosexual students, students whose parents are homosexual, or others, regardless of sexual orientation.

Some Washington state parents, however, say the new association is exclusionary and promotes a social, moral and political agenda that students are told they should accept regardless of the values they have been taught by their parents at home.

"There are an awful lot of parents, teachers and students who do not affirm homosexuality, whether it's based on their religious beliefs or their own moral values or medical concerns," said Linda Jordan, who represents a group called Parents and Teachers for Responsible Schools.

But in the public school system, she said, those who don't accept homosexuality are told they are wrong and labeled as bigots.

Mrs. Jordan, whose own son is grown but who is raising two nieces, pulled both girls out of public schools and enrolled them in a Catholic school because of her concern that local schools were promoting inappropriate values through pro-homosexual curricula.

"We were struck with the hypocrisy, which I call a 'homopocrisy,' reserved for homosexuals only," she said of the Seattle area public schools. "When it's concerned with heterosexual information, parents have to be notified and they have to be given the option to opt out. But when it came to homosexual education, parents were not given

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an option to opt out or review materials. That's just outrageous."

Eleanor Durham, a Seattle lawyer and member of Parents and Teachers for Responsible Schools, said PTAs function primarily to help elementary schools, not high schools where sexuality is more of an issue for teen-age students.

Elementary school-age children, she said, are far too young to be exposed to a dialogue about sexual orientation and acceptance.

"There is a strategy afoot to get down into kindergarten and indoctrinate children on the acceptance and normalcy of homosexuality," she said. The new PTA "is just another effort to create a forum for homosexual activists to activate their agenda in the public schools."

Mrs. Jordan said her group developed a parent notification form to allow families to remove their children when material concerning sexuality was covered in classes, but many school officials refused to accept it.

She believes allowing a PTA to organize around a homosexual agenda opens the window for a host of other PTAs to form around certain special interest groups. That, she said, violates the spirit of the PTA, which she believes is designed to help all children and not separate them by race or sex or lifestyle.

"Why couldn't Christians start a Christian PTA to look out for the interests of students who are Christians?" she said. "Lord knows their values get attacked in public schools ... but it would be completely inappropriate to set up 50 little special interest groups at schools."

Gay Lesbian PTSA President Susan Carmel, whose own homosexual son had a difficult time when he was in school years ago, told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, that several of the association's new members are heterosexual. Her chapter welcomes people of all sexual orientations, and is designed to help all schools and families.

Some of the activities may have nothing to do with issues of sexuality, she said.

Homosexual students, she said, often feel harassed at schools and need understanding and support.

"The learning stops when kids feel threatened like this," she told the Post-Intelligencer. "They do not feel safe in schools, and there is no reason for that."